1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

North of the square stands the church, a substantial structure with rounded arches in the Roman style, roofed over, like most other buildings, with galvanized iron. Other public buildings are the town hall — the Mairie — and the "Hall of Justice"; near by are the stone walls of a public building begun some years ago as a school, but destined apparently to house what is known as the "Bureau of Contributions," a euphemism for the tax-collector's quarters. Despite the fact that Mirebalais was one of the most difficult regions for the American occupation to subdue during the Caco uprising of 1918–20,[11] it was one of the first districts where the Guarde d'Haiti was completely Haitianized, and from which all American Marine officers were withdrawn. Only a small detachment is stationed there at present. Its well-kept barracks are near the church, and the prisons form a part of the same compound, from whence issue daily the striped-suited prisoners, men and women, under guard or alone on parole, who do communal work in the town and the near-by countryside.

The town awakens at dawn to the chattering of domesticated guinea-fowl and the crowing of cocks. Occasionally a camion rumbles through the principal thoroughfare; more rarely an automobile dashes by in great clouds of dust on its way to Las Cahobas, or Hinche, or Santo Domingo City. If it is a market day, the streets are early filled with country folk on their way to dispose of their produce, and the clatter from the market place behind the church is heard everywhere until the heat of the day brings a lull to all commerce, and drowsiness once more settles over everything. By mid-afternoon during the planting season, drums can be heard over the countryside. The sounds are not those of the "throbbing" *vodun* drums — though they have more than once been mistaken for them by travelers — but they set the rhythm for the communal work of the *combites*, which perform cooperative agricultural labor. As the rapid dusk follows the disappearance of the sun behind the mountains, the voices of

J: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 EV3 Haiti EV3 Mirebalais

neighbors paying friendly visits and of playing children gradually become stilled. It is the time for the evening meal. By nine o'clock at the latest all is quiet and Mirebalais, man and beast, is asleep.

The *vodun* drums are heard only on Saturday nights, and then the dance must be sufficiently close to the town, and the wind in the right direction, for the sound to be audible. Permits for these dances must be obtained, and are regularly given by the police officials — or were in 1934 — and word is passed on that on a given Saturday certain households will give *vodun* dances. If the dances are held in the foothills to the west, the Tombe River must be forded, and the existence of such a barrier between the village and the site of the dance makes this a favorite region in which to hold them, even though they may have official sanction. During the rainy season attendance at dances on the opposite bank of the Artibonite River depends on the height of the stream, for when it is in flood not even the dugout canoes of the Haitians can cross it, while the ferry which Moreau de St. Mery speaks of as having been established in 1749 does not even exist in local tradition.[14] Yet no dance lacks participants or spectators, for these occasions furnish the principal opportunity for recreation even as they fill their proper religious function. Early in the week discussions can be heard of the dances to be held, and though the official frown of the Catholic priest is always to be reckoned with, the importance of these dances, and the numbers who attend them, do not seem markedly lessened by this fact. Those whose social position in the community makes them more sensitive to such criticism merely take the precaution to slip quietly out of town after dark.

When occasions of local or national significance and church holidays are celebrated, the town is full of country folk and visitors from the cities. Christmas and New Year's, Mardi Gras and Easter are all periods for such celebrations, while the first Sunday of every month witnesses a religious procession

J: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER IV

THE SETTING OF HAITIAN LIFE

Since the discovery by the Spaniards that the wealth of Haiti lay rather in cultivating sugar than in the exploitation of gold mines, its dominant economy has been agricultural. In the valley of Mirebalais, as elsewhere in the island, the small cultivator holds the center of the economic stage. In the main *he works his own land, inherited from his father* or acquired through purchase. He may also cultivate additional plots of ground which he rents, since much of the land expropriated when independence was gained was retained by the State and today is leased for nominal fees.[1]

The life of the Haitian farmer, though hard, is simple and self-contained. With but few exceptions, he supplies all his necessities, for he commands almost the entire range of techniques known to his culture; hence Haitian economy shows a lack of specialization that in the main is only relieved by the sex division of labor. The day's work begins at dawn, the women rising before the men to prepare coffee, the invariable drink of early morning. When finished with his breakfast, the farmer goes to his field, where, except for the hottest hours, he works until sundown, his one meal being brought to him at about nine or ten o'clock in the morning. His wife meanwhile occupies herself with her household tasks, pounding [corn in her mortar] or working in her garden near by.

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

grain in her mortar or working in her garden near by. On market days she takes the produce of the family's fields to the town to sell. If she has young children, she cares for them while she does her other work, but when they are old enough, they help her about the house if they are girls, or, if boys, go with their father to the garden. From time to time, when house repairs are needed or there are implements to be mended, the man spends a day at home getting these odd jobs done; otherwise only serious illness in the family keeps him from his fields.

The times for meals have not varied since the days when Moreau de St. Mery described the eating-habits of the slaves.[1] In addition to the mid-morning repast, the only other meal is that eaten after the man returns from his field, this being the largest of the day. A wife does not sit down with her husband, but usually eats earlier with her small children and holds herself ready to serve him upon his return, when, if he is alone, she remains to tell him the day's gossip. Visitors are often present, for peasant etiquette demands that all comers be offered food, and, as one Haitian expressed it, "The peasant would kill you for the insult if you did not share your meal with him." Bedtime, as might be expected, is early.

On Sundays and on the days of festivals this routine is interrupted, when, if the occasion is of sufficient importance and the habitation is not too far from town, the peasant and his family attend mass. On Saturday nights there is usually a *vodun* dance, when the early hour for retirement is forgotten and all-night festivities precede Sunday's rest. On such days the principal meal is eaten at three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and all the adults share it together, while at one side the children are fed from the dishes of their parents in response to the insistent repetition of the demand "*Ba'm pa'm* — give me my portion." *

* This is an example of the elision characteristic of Haitian Créole, it being abbreviated from *Ba moin part moin ce*, in French, *Donnez-moi ma part*.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

therefore plantations must be made to yield the uttermost farthing if the nobleman was to pay for the necessities of strict court etiquette. It was by no means a childish whim which prompted Christophe to call himself a king; rather an intelligent utilization of the human material the leader had to work with. Vanity was to serve an economic and a political purpose.

Christophe perceived that the defect of Dessalines' reign had been lack of security, both of person and property. Agriculture is a long-term investment and so must be hedged about by orderly rules. To this end the monarch stated his laws clearly, charged a fixed tax—one fourth of the annual crop—which would enrich the kingdom while allowing the tenant-proprietor a reasonable profit, and then guaranteed that no arbitrary demands would be made. Certainly there was no pampering of the wealthy, but there was ample prosperity resulting from regularity and security.

The ordinary citizen was, as he had been, bound to the soil as an agricultural laborer. This quasi-serfdom, however, was comparative freedom. It simply meant that the home and work of a man must be at the plantation on which he had been born. Saturday afternoons and Sundays were free, so that the laborers might make the most of their opportunities to visit the nearest market village, to buy and sell small goods, gossip, and enjoy the sociability of being part of a crowd. Being bound to the soil meant simply that they could not move, when the impulse seized them, to another plantation or another part of the country. Those whose mothers or relatives were natives of a plantation must return to that estate, being forbidden to live in towns. No person, military or other, who did not derive his living from a plantation, could marry an agricultural worker—a prohibition designed to prevent workers from leaving estates because of family ties, and particularly to prevent women, as mothers of future cultivators, from deserting agriculture.

Mediaeval serfdom itself went no further in binding people to the soil. Indeed, it did not go so far in regulating the daily life of serfs. Under Christophe the cultivators lived according to a routine as strict as that of a school. Reveille was rung as early as three o'clock to arouse women to prepare breakfasts for their menfolk; by four or four-thirty the bell was sounded for the commencement of work, which began after prayers had been led by the overseer. At nine o'clock there was a pause for luncheon, and then a resumption of

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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work until noon. A two-hour siesta followed, but from two until sunset there was steady work. Only after evening prayers was the worker free. During the day no cultivator might leave his task except for direst need. The lame and the halt were not required to till the fields, but must carry around buckets of drinking water, take care of the children, and do odd jobs about the estate.

Christophe made a steady and, in the main, successful effort to explain to the people the necessity of hard work on the plantation. As with the noblemen, the serfs knew precisely what was expected of them, and why. Their regimentation was strict, but understandable. It was clearly stipulated that if a worker shirked his job he was to be put in prison and made to do forced labor there. Laziness in the fields was to be punished by strokes from the overseer's liane. Hard and steady work was demanded during the whole thirteen years of Christophe's rule, but only rarely was there complaint, as there had been constantly under Dessalines, of cruelty on the part of overseers.

The quarter part of the total crop of any plantation was to go to the workers as wages, and, since production increased and prices rose, this quarter which they were free to spend as they pleased provided a powerful incentive to further industry. As compared with anything they had known before, the workers were now recipients of an ample income. On the plantations they cultivated the money crops of sugar and coffee. In addition, each family had its own garden plot on which to raise the food crops—yams, plantains, beans, and bananas—for personal use.[9]

Christophe was so far ahead of his time that he tried to introduce British methods of agriculture into his kingdom. The results were insignificant. The plough, although obviously superior in efficiency to the hoe, eliminated the sociable companionship of working in unison, and demanded horses and mules which the country lacked. The innovations were consequently too radical to be accepted. In the main, the agricultural methods of the kingdom continued to be those familiar in slave days.

Thirteen years of careful direction can fix many patterns of social routine. One of Christophe's rules was that no cultivator attached to

9. The staples of other countries, such as Irish potatoes, wheat, barley, and oats, did not flourish in Haiti. On the large plantations, indigo and cotton, which had been money crops in the French régime, were generally neglected, as they had been in the time of Dessalines.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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643 and being the personal property of the monarch and recipients of his
701 royal favor, were to constitute the perpetual support of his throne.
625 Only four thousand of these compulsory immigrants came, but
625 Christophe made them into very effective companies of police, whom he named the Royal Dahomets from the country of their origin. They performed the duties of a gendarmerie in all the districts of the North, drove the cultivators to their labors, watched over property and the security of the proprietors, and maintained industry and a strict subordination among all ranks of people in the kingdom.

175 Christophe's regular troops were well clothed and armed. They
701 were kept under stern discipline, no mercy or relaxation being
[703] shown them; delinquency on their part brought flagellation or a military execution. The troops received only a nominal stipend, and each soldier was required to gain his subsistence by cultivating a few acres of ground allotted to him out of the national domain. The usual quarter of this income had, of course, to be turned over as a tax to the state. Although the King's power was maintained by soldiers, he never coddled them. "The soldiers of the army as well as the laborers of the plantations lived in perpetual dread of the rod of authority," wrote Brown.[14] They seem to have developed a tradition of some special fetish power possessed by Christophe, a sort of *mana*, to use anthropological terminology. Even princes and dukes were chastised by the King's orders, and then made to do menial work by way of further punishment.

Conditions in the republic of Pétion were similar and yet different —similar in that soldiers formed the support of the government, different in that Pétion did not rule by fear. Every individual man between 16 and 60, a few cultivators excepted, was required by law to be a soldier, either in the *corps solde* (regular troops of the line), or in the *corps non solde* (national guard). The former, both under Pétion and in the early days of Boyer, had about 40,000 men distributed in strong detachments in towns and communes all over the
[914] country. Their costume, instead of being neat, uniform, and daily inspected as with Christophe's army, was ragged and mismated; they
[465] managed according to popular parlance "to find linen on every
[541] hedge." They were paid from fifty cents to a dollar a month, according to the existing solvency or exigency of the state. Each week
[512] end a parade and review was held, and then a small fatigue party was taken to do actual duty, the others being dismissed until the next

14. *Op. cit.*, II, 209.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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Saturday to use their time cultivating the soil, pursuing some mechanical craft, or acting as day laborers.

It must be once more emphasized that the civil was everywhere subservient to the military power. The administration of justice in tribunals was carried out only at the pleasure of the army chiefs. No person would have dared bring suit against a high officer; the only efficacious way of obtaining justice against petty offenders was through summary decision and corporal chastisement by the commanding officer.

By the close of Boyer's rule, during which he had kept the army up to its full numbers while pursuing a policy of economy, the outward appearance of the troops was almost ludicrous. They appeared at review wearing generally what pleased them or what they could scrape together, for they had to supply their own clothing and arms. The only effectual employment of the soldiery was as armed police, for Haiti never had to fight external powers. The soldiers drummed and fifed, mustered on parade and went through the formations, but otherwise merely stood (or sat) sentry at the doors of public offices, hunted up at the command of the magistrates *les mauvais sujets*, guarded prisons and prisoners on chain-gang duty, loitered at barriers, collected tolls, and examined permits.

A large army, practically idle, could easily be seduced into the support of revolutionary movements. Principles of discipline and loyalty current in European armies of the day were nonexistent in nineteenth-century Haiti. The numbers in the army varied from twenty to forty or fifty thousand. A strange estimate was made for the year 1867: 6,500 general officers and staff; 7,000 regimental officers; and only 6,500 soldiers.[15] It was said that "*tout Haïtien qui n'était pas général de division était au moins soldat.*" The higher grades became rewards for political service; the lower ranks had to be filled up by recruiting parties—when these were abroad, all men who did not desire a period of enforced leisure away from home remained in hiding.

While the army was not alone responsible for the tragedies of insurrection and mismanagement which consistently befell the country, it was never uninvolved in these misfortunes. Only the radical reforms undertaken by the American Occupation saved modern Haiti from continued military domination.

15. Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti, or the Black Republic*, p. 310.